



Certified Access Specialist Program

Staff Report 2.1

PROFESSIONAL SCOPE OF THE CERTIFIED ACCESS SPECIALIST PROGRAM

April 30, 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senate Bill 262 (Chapter 872, Statutes of 2003) provides a clear procedural mandate for establishing a program to certify access specialists. Actual roles and duties of those certified are not specified in the legislation, allowing broad flexibility to incorporate certified specialists into the professional activities of disability access.

Another effect of not specifying professional roles and duties is that this legislation does not set programmatic limits. Successful establishment of the Certified Access Specialist program relies on a complete identification of the range of activities in which access specialists will be professionally involved.

The task of setting programmatic boundaries should be undertaken before beginning any consideration of certification criteria, to best ensure timely completion of committee work. Techniques used by the committee to evaluate potential certification criteria, such as to *compare and contrast*, are valid only when applied to all non-trivial cases in the scope of the program. Were there no changes in scope during the life of the committee, its confidence and decisiveness would improve because of the demonstrated reliability of the program scope. Conversely, a programmatic change resulting from the realization of an additional professional role, at any point in the project schedule, requires revisiting every certification issue previously finalized, resulting in confusion and delays.

This paper presents no specific recommendation for committee action. Instead, it clarifies the issue seeking to set programmatic boundaries on which the committee will base its consideration of certification criteria. It describes research methodology and subjects, presents three alternatives on the specification of the program's professional scope. The resulting conclusion characterizes the professional scope of access specialists in terms of their roles in four distinct specialty areas of practice. Such distinction will allow for effective definition of subsequent certification criteria, such as separate classifications of certification, individualized performance standards, and a variety of avenues of professional experience which may serve as pre-qualifications for certification candidates.

CONCLUSIONS

The professional scope of certified access specialists includes their involvement in the following activities:

1. Preparing and/or reviewing accessibility requirements in construction drawings.

2. Inspecting the construction of accessible features, for verifying completion and correctness.
3. Facilitating the assertion of disability rights, including but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Acting as an ombudsperson to persons who have encountered barriers to access.
 - b. Preparing facility surveys that evaluate accessibility.
 - c. Monitoring corrective work specified in stipulated court judgments.
4. Acting as an ADA coordinator for a government agency, or in similar roles for public accommodations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Staff examined a variety of documents on the subject of professional certification, beginning with a reference book containing descriptions of hundreds of national certification programs¹. This guide also includes descriptions of organizations that evaluate certification programs. One program, the Council of Engineering and Science Specialty Boards (CESB), has published guidelines for establishing new certification programs².

In narrowing the focus of research to consider certification of specialists in the field of disability access, staff reviewed the content of Senate Bill 262 for any language suggesting program scope. Specific searches of Internet resources provided links to a certification test program administered by the International Code Council³, including a national database of those certified by passing an examination titled "Accessibility Inspector / Plans Examiner." Information about Registered Accessibility Specialists, as administered by the Texas Architectural Barriers Program, is abundant⁴, including descriptions of their roles and duties. These two references provided information on specialist responsibilities in plan review and construction inspection in their programs.

The first meeting of this program's Implementation Committee included discussion suggesting an expansion of program scope beyond those of the existing programs above⁵. Two committee members suggested in their presentations that access specialists could effectively contribute in the additional roles of monitoring stipulated court judgments or as ombudspersons on behalf of those who have encountered access barriers. Another committee member presented a positive review of current professional performance in related roles, such as in assessing the compliance of existing facilities.

¹ *The Guide to National Professional Certification Programs*, Third Edition. HRD Press: Amherst, Massachusetts.

² *Guidelines for Engineering and Related Specialty Certification Programs*. CESB: Annapolis, MD.

³ International Code Council: Falls Church, VA: <http://www.iccsafe.org/certification/aipe.html>

⁴ State of Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation: Austin, TX:
<http://www.license.state.tx.us/ab/ab.htm>

⁵ *Minutes of Meeting of April 14, 2004 of the Implementation Committee of the Certified Access Program*. Division of the State Architect: Sacramento, CA:

Research on programmatic boundaries of certified access specialists included a thorough review of current State regulations on plan review of public school construction projects⁶ and those for DSA project inspectors⁷.

DISCUSSION

A formal assertion of the bounds of professional responsibility of certified access specialists should preface any definition of the underlying principles of the Certified Access Specialist program. The most useful form of this expression is in terms of the roles and duties anticipated for access specialists. In doing so, the Implementation Committee would be acting within its mandated role as the "...ad hoc advisory committee to assist in developing the requirements for certification as access specialists...."⁸

The anticipated roles and duties of certified access specialists must be defined within parameters that best ensure they will actually occur. In particular, these roles and duties must not rely on invoking any changes in the regulation of existing governmental procedures. As a general example, a specialist could improve or facilitate a procedure by professionally assisting someone, provided the assistance does not alter the legal obligations of those currently involved. Conversely, a scenario in which specialists of the future issue citations (i.e. tickets) for disability violations would not be valid, since it relies on presumed future regulations that would authorize specialists citation this regard.

ALTERNATIVES

Staff considers three alternatives as viable: (1) establish of the program without differentiating the professional roles of access specialists; (2) define program boundaries that correspond, to the greatest extent possible, to those of existing programs in disability access; and (3) expand the scope of the second alternative to include additional roles inferred by the language of Senate Bill 262.

The first alternative establishes a program without role distinctions. It neither sets a boundary for program responsibility, nor does it categorize activities within its scope. There would be no consideration of differences in required skills or allied professional preparation in certification. This approach relies on the premise that all activities of certified access specialists rely on a single breadth of knowledge and competence. This simplistic approach proves ineffective when testing significant requirements in multiple professional roles. For example, consider whether all access specialists should have an architectural background. If this became a requirement, the range of potential specialists would be restricted, and many professionals currently practicing in disability access would be denied participation in the program. Conversely, should an architectural background not be required, it is easy to foresee mismatches of untrained specialists who review architectural projects. The success of a certification program without role distinctions would thus rely on how well specialists *collectively* perform in addressing the *unrestricted, combined range* of all problems encountered in disability access.

The second alternative is one of conformance: limiting the program's scope to the roles and duties of the two existing programs in disability access. Review of the certification examination by ICC

⁶ Division of the State Architect: Sacramento, CA:
<http://www.dsa.dgs.ca.gov/ProjectSubmittalProcess/planrev.htm>

⁷ California Code Of Regulations, Title 24, Part 1, Group 1, *Safety of Construction of Public Schools*

⁸ California Senate Bill 262, Chapter 872, Statutes of 2003.

and analysis of the regulations for Registered Accessibility Specialists (RAS) in Texas reveal two distinct roles for access specialists: (1) reviewing construction drawings of proposed construction for compliance with access requirements, and (2) inspection of such construction to verify its completion and correctness.

The third alternative is that anticipated by and alluded to in Senate Bill 262. The bill mandates the determination of criteria for certification “in order to be a certified access specialist, which may include knowledge sufficient to review, inspect or advocate universal design requirements...”

This passage identifies the roles of plan reviewer and construction inspector, and introduces an additional specialist role to “advocate universal design requirements.” Two interpretations of this phrase are possible. The first places the specialist (as advocate) in the earliest of architectural design stages, in order to best incorporate the elegance of universal design into a facility’s overall design. The second interpretation uses “advocate” to indicate a person who would provide professional services on behalf of the disabled, especially to resolve access problems. The role corresponding to the first interpretation is included in the activities of a plan reviewer. The other interpretation would be accounted for in differentiating a new professional role for access specialists that does not involve plan review nor construction inspection.

The third professional role substantiates the assertions of several committee members that certified access specialists might facilitate litigation in disability access; their involvement is likely to further strengthen a mechanism for correcting access problems that has proven to be highly effective.

DSA staff identified another new role that would improve the quality of enforcement of disability compliance. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as implemented by California Government Code Section 4450 et seq., addresses access to government entities. It requires each government agency to designate an “ADA Coordinator” as a lead person working toward access compliance.⁹ Progress in this effort has been slower than expected, and staff envisions the opportunity to strengthen the performance of ADA Coordinators. Coordinators could obtain a specific type of certification with the objective to better enable them to promote standards, establish protocols, and improve the documents of service of ADA Coordinators and persons in similar roles for public accommodations

IMPLEMENTATION

This paper will be reviewed consistent with all staff reports for the Certified Access Specialist program. Comments from senior staff of the Office of Universal Design (OUD) will be incorporated into the initial staff report before forwarding to the State Architect for final review and approval to distribute this document to the program’s Implementation Committee.

⁹ http://www.documents.dgs.ca.gov/dsa/pubs/5phases_accesscompliance.pdf . Division of the State Architect, Sacramento, CA